

February 10, 2009

Senator Toni Harp & Representative John Geragosian
Appropriation Committee Co-Chairs
Legislative Office Building, Room 2700
Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Honorable Senator Toni Harp and Honorable John Geragosian:

The 125 members of the Hartford Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. wish to respectfully submit our testimony opposing the removal of administrative and operating cost for the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) from the 2009-2010 budget as proposed by Governor Jodi Rell. Elimination of this Commission is short-term savings that will in no way offset the long-term cost the State will bear as a result of Commission not being in place to advocate for the underrepresented and underserved citizens of Connecticut.

Having partnered with the Commission on several occasions regarding community issues and being intricately aware of the positive influences and outcomes of the AAAC, we believe the result of budget elimination will create a governmental and communal void. As such, we implore the members of the Appropriation Committee to consider the voice, representation, legislation, fundraising, and community outreach that the AAAC has employed as resources to address the issues and policies that affect African Americans in the State of Connecticut. Without the AAAC's sponsorship, many issues that disparately affect African Americans would be overlooked and underrepresented.

The following is a cursory list of the major issues and initiatives that the AAAC has sponsored:

- Education Issues: Co-sponsoring college preparation programs for over 15,000 first generation and economically disadvantaged students, many of whom are African-American, and offering scholarships to 12 youth recognized as "Youth of the Year;"
- Health Care Issues: Securing funding in 2006 to support the establishment of the state's first Sickle Cell Treatment Center, a disease that disproportionately affects African-Americans;
- Voting Rights Issues: Supporting the 2001 Voting Rights Restoration Act, legislation which enabled convicted felons who have completed their prison sentences to renew their right to the franchise, an issue that disproportionately affects African-Americans and Latinos, who also are disproportionately represented as felons in the criminal justice system in Connecticut; and
- Civil Rights Issues: Sponsoring Senate Bill 604-An Act Concerning Hate Crimes, legislation making it a crime to hang nooses on public or private property with the intent to intimidate or harass another person, an issue with historical significance for African-Americans' experiences with race, discrimination and intimidation in the United States.

The aforementioned activities offer a select list of activities that have benefited the African American community in the State of Connecticut. Moreover, the benefits of these activities truly go beyond the African American community to encompass the entire state. What is the cost for alternative agencies to make sure these needs are continually met?

We can attest to the community outreach efforts of the AAAC through engagements that make an impact on the lives of youth in the Greater Hartford community. Specifically, on Saturday, May 10, 2008, Hartford Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and the AAAC co-sponsored an event titled "Community Conversations" in the Legislative Office Building. The focus of the engagement was parental empowerment through involvement. More than 300 parents, social workers, students, family members and friends were in attendance, enabling robust discussion about ways education can be improved through parental awareness and involvement. The AAAC helps bridge the gap that exists between community and government in real-time.

As a governmental institution, the AAAC enhances both a positive relationship and increased trust between a historically underrepresented group, like African-Americans and Connecticut's government. To this end, we, in solidarity with the Urban League of Greater Hartford, the CT Association of Equal Opportunity Programs, the Greater New England Alliance of Black School Professionals, the Southern New England Association of Technical Professionals, the Minority Construction Council, the Black Lawyers Association, the Alpha Psi Boulé, the Coalition of Independent Contractors (Taxi drivers), Donate Life, the CT Statewide Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the CT Pardon Team, the Foundation for Educational Advancement, the Greater Hartford Male Youth Leadership Program, the CT Heart Association, the CT Chapter of the Lupus Foundation of America, the CT Kidney Foundation, the CT Association of Centers for Independent Living, the American Federation of Federal, State, County and Municipal Employees, and the Coalition for Environmental Justice, respectfully submit our vehement support for the retention of the AAAC's funding *by* and ultimate existence *in* the State of Connecticut.

Respectfully Submitted on Behalf of the 125 Members of Hartford Alumnae Chapter Delta Sigma Theta Sorority,

Cheryl Hickmon
President

Miranda Gary
First Vice President